



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 8
999 18TH STREET - SUITE 300
DENVER, CO 80202-2466
<http://www.epa.gov/region08>

19 September, 2000

Ref: 8EPR-EP

Bert Kulesza
Forest Supervisor
Ashley National Forest
355 North Vernal Avenue
Vernal, UT 84078

Re: Trout Slope East Timber Project
Final EIS and Record of Decision
CEQ# 000313

Dear Mr. Kulesza:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 (EPA) has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) on the Trout Slope East Timber Project. Our review of this project was conducted in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

Our review of the FEIS and ROD for this project found both documents to be responsive to the concerns we expressed with the Draft EIS. With this project, the USFS has been forthright with respect to both the project purpose and the expected impacts. The ROD does an admirable job of balancing the need for forest products, with the responsibility to protect ecosystem values on the Forest. We particularly appreciate the USFS' efforts through this decision to assist the West Fork drainage to recover from the impacts of past human use that have resulted in that watershed being out of compliance with Forest Standards. Because the West Fork has the potential to support Colorado River Cutthroat Trout, a species that has lost most of its historic range, this and future efforts to restore this watershed are imperative.

We believe this decision was made possible by the increased specificity included in the Final EIS compared to the Draft EIS. The decision maker had access to thorough, site-specific information about the environmental conditions at the project site, resulting in the ability to arrive at a balanced and environmentally sensitive decision.

Our office reviews NEPA documents over a six state area in the Rocky Mountain West and the Dakotas. We have found it rare for timber sale decisions to be in full compliance with



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Forest Objectives, Standards and Guidelines. This Decision is in full compliance with the Ashley Forest Plan, and even goes beyond the minimum protections afforded by the Plan and environmental regulation while still meeting the project purpose. For this, the Ashley National Forest deserves recognition.

There was one question EPA brought up in our comments on the DEIS for which we could not find a response in the FEIS. We asked that the FEIS identify whether any of the streams in the project scope of analysis were on the State 303(d) list of impaired waters. If in fact, none of the streams are on the 303(d) list, EPA has no further concerns or objections with this project based on the information available from the FEIS and ROD.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this project and provide comments. Should you have any questions regarding these comments, you may contact Phil Strobel of my staff at (303) 312-6704.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By Cynthia Cody

Cynthia G. Cody, Chief
NEPA Unit